

ASSURING MOBILITY IN A COIN ENVIRONMENT

By Major Iain J. Church

Although the concept of assured mobility was designed to ensure success on a linear battlefield against a conventional enemy, the fundamentals of assured mobility are equally important in defeating an unconventional enemy on an asymmetric battlefield (see Figure 1). Assured mobility can be described as a model that enables commanders to see first, understand first, act first, and finish decisively. While the fundamentals (predict, detect, prevent, avoid, neutralize, protect) remain the same regardless of the operation, they must be understood within the context of the environment faced—in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan, counterinsurgency (COIN) campaigns on an asymmetric battlefield.

Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus described the insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan as follows: “*The insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan were not, in truth, the wars for which we were best prepared in 2001; however,*

they are the wars we are fighting and clearly the kind of wars we must master.”¹ In an effort to master these wars, the Engineer Regiment is developing capabilities that are not only affecting the current fight but also establishing a potent capability for future operations—mixing design and execution of courses to build new capabilities and educating commanders on how all capabilities, new and existing, can impact the asymmetric battlefield. The Engineer Regiment will play a key role in assuring mobility and successful execution of COIN operations. However, to fully understand the impact that harnessing new and existing capabilities can have, we need to first understand the environment they are to be used in.

The linear battlefield is a simple one—success can be quantified by measuring the enemy’s remaining combat power in conjunction with the location of the front line. In contrast, COIN operations on the asymmetric battlefield can’t be

quantified as easily and, by their nature, are drawn-out affairs². Unlike conventional war, they rarely produce instant results. Furthermore, when successful operations occur, success can be quickly overshadowed by the slightest amount of collateral damage that can be used by insurgents to turn a tactical setback into a strategic gain.

While serving as commander of the United States Southern Command, General John R. Galvin succinctly captured the problem facing military powers engaged in COIN operations when he stated, “*The...burden on the military institution is large. Not only must it subdue an armed adversary while attempting to provide security to the civilian population, it must also avoid furthering the insurgents’ cause. If, for example, the military’s actions in killing 50 guerillas cause 200 previously uncommitted citizens to join the insurgent cause, the use of force will have been counterproductive.*”³

Ultimately, success in COIN operations is gained by protecting the populace rather than the COIN force and by maintaining legitimacy. The effect of protecting the populace is twofold: First, COIN forces establish and maintain legitimacy; and second, the insurgents’ most valuable resource—the support of the populace—will be eroded. The protection of the populace and the ability of commanders to assure mobility are inextricably linked; you cannot achieve one without the other. Success cannot be achieved through the use of kinetic means alone; success will result from a combined use of kinetic and nonkinetic means. In a COIN environment, it is easier to separate an insurgency from

The Fundamentals of Assured Mobility

Predict actions and circumstances that could affect maneuverability.

Detect early indicators of impediments to battlefield mobility.

Prevent potential impediments to maneuverability from affecting battlefield mobility of the force. A key is to develop predict-to-prevent linkages to detect impediments and identify alternative mobility corridors needed to...

Avoid battlefield impediments.

Neutralize, reduce, or overcome impediments (from traditional mines to industrial chemicals) that cannot be prevented or avoided.

Protect against the effects of enemy impediments. Successful application of assured mobility analysis is gained through a sequential and continuous application of the fundamentals throughout the imperatives en route.

Figure 1

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“One of the most overt tools in the current COIN fight is route clearance teams (RCTs), with a combination of Buffalo, RG-31, and Husky or Meerkat vehicles.”

its resources than it is to kill every insurgent. Therefore, it is incumbent on the training base to develop capabilities and train the force in the full range of kinetic and nonkinetic skills to set the conditions for success.

The United States Army Engineer School’s Counter Explosive Hazards Center (CEHC) at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, is developing three key capabilities that will provide commanders the tools to help protect the populace and assure mobility: search, route clearance, and counter explosive hazards planning. Teaching new skills is easy; however, as Sir Basil Liddell Hart stated in *Thoughts on War*, “...the real challenge is not to put a new idea into the military mind but to put the old one out....”⁴ Educating the chain of command in the use of new skills is just as important as developing and teaching new skills. Search and route clearance courses concentrate on developing skills, and in order to educate the chain of command, the Counter Explosive Hazards–Planning (CEH-P) Course concentrates on how to employ all counter improvised explosive device (IED) assets in a COIN environment.

Search operations, possibly the commander’s most potent nonkinetic weapon in COIN operations, can be offensive or defensive in nature. In addition, within an assured mobility context, search operations can impact across each of the fundamentals, but in both cases it is a significant force multiplier. Successful search operations are crucial to the success of COIN operations. It is better to find 100 detonators in a cache than to deal with 100 IEDs on the battlefield. Every layer of an insurgent network is susceptible to search operations, and secrecy and plausible deniability are crucial throughout an insurgent organization. Intelligence-generated search operations allow the counterinsurgent to gather the necessary evidence to negate

both. Successful tactical operations have the potential for an operational and strategic impact—a successful search operation may produce the evidence required to convict key insurgent leaders in a court of law.

CEHC has started to develop a comprehensive search capability within the U.S. military, and it was limited to a 3-week advanced search course that covers six core skills: manual route search, person search, vehicle search, occupied- and unoccupied-building search, cache search, and area search. However, in an effort to increase the number of students and better meet the needs of the field, a 1-week all arms combat search course has been designed that focuses on personnel search, vehicle search, cache search, area search, and occupied-building search. Both courses emphasize the importance of intelligence, planning, flexibility on task, methodical searching, evidence handling, completion of documentation, and postoperation debriefs. The net result of these courses will be to build a graduated search capability that commanders can apply to operations depending on the complexity of the task and the value of the target.

One of the most overt tools in the current COIN fight is route clearance teams (RCTs), with a combination of Buffalo, RG-31, and Husky or Meerkat vehicles. RCTs provide a line of defense against IEDs, maintain lines of communication, and protect the populace and coalition forces. CEHC conducts a 2-week route reconnaissance and clearance course for Army and Marine Corps engineers on the use of all route clearance equipment (RCE). Training focuses on the application of fundamental route clearance principles and is aimed at operators and platoon-level leadership.

Due to the success of RCTs, it isn’t surprising that they have become insurgent targets. A significant problem

that exists for RCTs is the time it takes to deal with IED incidents. In order to enhance the capability of RCTs and reduce incident times, CEHC has developed a 2-week Route Reconnaissance and Clearance Course–Sapper (R2C2-S) to train the investigation and blowing in place (BiP) of IEDs using robotic platforms. Strict protocols have been developed outlining when and what R2C2-S trained personnel can BiP; their actions will be directed by individual theater policy.

Because developing new skills doesn’t answer all of the field’s needs, CEHC has designed the CEH-P course to ensure that new and existing skills are tasked and coordinated to have maximum impact on COIN operations. The course is aimed at brigade combat team, battalion, and company S-3 personnel who will be responsible for coordinating all counter-IED assets. It isn’t designed to be a battle staff course per se. It concentrates on the importance of integrating assets and fundamentals of COIN operations and highlights the impact that current and new capabilities can have if fully integrated with one another, such as building linkages between RCTs; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets; and predictive analysis. As with all CEHC courses, emphasis is placed on knowledge and *how* to think—not *what* to think.

The development of new skills and the education of the force addresses two of the three areas critical to success: what needs to be trained and how capabilities should be employed. However, the mindset of commanders ultimately decides whether a COIN campaign is successful. It is critical that an offensive mindset is maintained; adopting a defensive posture to mitigate risk to COIN personnel is ultimately counterproductive. Field Manual (FM) 3-24 states, “If military forces remain in their compounds, they lose touch with the

Improvised Explosive Device Incidents		
Year	Number of IEDs	Remarks
2005	12,556	
2006	30,515	
2007 (through 14 February)	4,738	At the current rate, the total for 2007 will be 40,847

Figure 2

people, appear to be running scared, and cede the initiative to the insurgents.”⁵ Efforts to protect the force have had a significant effect on the effectiveness of IEDs; however, as General Peter Pace stated to the Senate Armed Services Committee: “The increase in the number [of IEDs], despite the decrease in their effectiveness, has resulted in about a sustained level of casualties from IEDs...”⁶ Figure 2 outlines the significant increase in IED incidents over the last 2 years.⁷

The insurgent is thus retaining enough freedom of maneuver to engage coalition forces at times and locations of his choosing; the goals of assured mobility and protecting the populace are not being achieved. While clearly it is important to protect the force against the effects of IEDs, more must be done to protect the force and the populace by preventing their emplacement in the first place. This can be achieved by applying the principles of assured mobility, protecting the populace, and developing a detailed understanding of the operating environment.

The Engineer School and CEHC are spearheading the effort to train the force to allow the U.S. military to master operations in a COIN environment. The skills being developed and trained allow the insurgent network to be engaged at a number of levels in such a way as to not alienate the populace. However, training new skills alone is not the answer. Success on the COIN battlefield will ultimately depend on assuring mobility and protecting the populace—and achieving both in a way to enhance the legitimacy of host nation governments.

For more information on all CEHC courses, see <www.wood.army.mil/cehc>.

Endnotes

¹Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus, “Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Iraq,” *Military Review*, January–February 2006.

²Both General Gregory A. Schumacher, Chief of Staff of the Army, and General James T. Conway, Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, have stated that the Iraq insurgency is likely to last 8 to 12 years.

³General John R. Galvin, “Uncomfortable Wars: Towards a New Paradigm,” *Parameters*, 16, No 4 (Winter 1986): 6.

⁴Sir Basil Liddell Hart, *Thoughts on War*, Farber and Farber, 1944.

⁵FM 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-33.5, *Counter-insurgency*, December 2006, para 1-149.

⁶Rowan Scarborough, “Enemy Doubles IED Use in Iraq,” *Washington Times*, 7 February 2007, <www.washingtontimes.com/national>, accessed on 13 March 2007.

⁷Figures derived from the Combined Information Data Network Exchange (CIDNE), accessed on 14 February 2007.

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